

Holt Town Council

The minutes of the Holt Town Council Meeting, held at 7pm on Monday 9th February 2026 at Holt Playing Fields Clubroom, Woodfield Road, Holt.

Attendees: Cllr Sarah Tribe (Mayor), Cllr Phil Wright (Deputy Mayor), Cllr Ray Moore, Cllr Maggie Prior, Cllr Bryan Payne, Cllr Tony Pointer, Cllr Martin Batey (HTC and District Cllr), Cllr Chris Bishop, Cllr Rodney Smith, Cllr Sandy Roper and Town Clerk Gemma Harrison.

County Cllr Eric Vardy was also present.

District Cllr Connor Rouse was also present.

0 Members of the public were present.

1. Welcome

1.1 Cllr Tribe welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. Apologies for absence.

2.1 Apologies received from Cllr Anita Jones, Cllr Sue Barham and Cllr Simon Williams. All apologies were accepted.

3. To consider requests for dispensations from the restriction of operating in the discussion or voting on a matter in which a member has a disclosable pecuniary interest.

3.1 Cllr Martin Batey stated that he has an interest in item 9 (Planning) as he is a member of the NNDC Development Control Committee.

4. Police Matters.

4.1 The anti-social behaviour in the town was discussed and Cllrs were updated on the recent arrests made. Cllrs extended thanks to Beat Officer PC Graham Gower-Smith and the team, for their hard work and prompt action in identifying those responsible.

4.2 Cllrs requested more information regarding the withdrawal of the local 4x4 Police vehicle. Cllrs highly value Neighbourhood Policing and are keen to make Norfolk Police aware of how important the service is for market towns and hope to encourage more investment into the service. Clerk to contact Norfolk Police.

GH

5. Announcements by Mayor

5.1 The Mayor's report was circulated prior to the meeting and can be seen in full at Appendix A.

Public Question Time

Limited to 15 Mins

- It was noted that residents have contacted Cllrs complaining about the recent Anglian Water works on Norwich Road. Workers did not work through the night as originally planned. Cllrs felt the works could have been organised better with less impact on commuter traffic.

6. Agree the Minutes of the Town Council Meeting dated Monday 12th January 2026.

6.1 The minutes were circulated prior to the meeting they were PROPOSED as accurate and correct by Cllr Rodney Smith and SECONDED by Cllr Tony Pointer and AGREED by all.

7. Matters Arising

7.1 The Clerk has reported the surface repairs at the junction between Nightjar Road and Hempstead Road. There is no update on when the repair work is due to take place, the Clerk will chase. A pothole opposite the BP garage in town was noted and will be reported. GH

7.2 Old Carpet Shop email update was circulated prior to the meeting.

7.3 The streetlight on Mill Court is on all the time and has been reported for repair.

7.4 The allotment transfer between Lovells and HTC is now progressing.

7.5 It was noted the Holt Vision video is on the HTC website.

8. Reports

8.1 **Norfolk County Council** – County Cllr Eric Vardy gave his report which can be seen at Appendix B.

8.2 **North Norfolk District Council** – Cllr Martin Batey and Cllr Connor Rouse gave the report. The Lidl application is now on track to be at the Development Control Committee in March. A recent meeting took place with providers to discuss the mobile coverage in the area with NNDC pushing for more investment. Concerns were raised about anti-social activity on the Lodge Close play area and increased dog fouling in the area. Cllr Rouse has reached out to

the Primary School to ask for a meeting with the MP to discuss the new school. The signatures on the new school petition are low and requires promotion.

8.3 Skate Park Committee – Cllr Sandy Roper gave the report. Fundraising efforts are ongoing. The Committee are still waiting for the Charity Commission consent for the lease for the Skate Park to be available. The Clerk will chase the Charity Commission for a response. **GH**

8.4 Holt Youth Council – The Youth Council met on Friday 6th February. They are working on the new Open Spaces leaflet, they will be running a window competition in the summer and hope to launch some initiatives to tackle loneliness in the town.

9. Planning

9.1 The planning report was circulated prior to the meeting. Cllr Moore stated he has concerns about the junction for the new Aldi site. Clerk to amend the report to add that preferred access should be from Old Station Way, Cllrs all agreed that the access requires careful examination. The planning report (with amendment) was PROPOSED by Cllr Maggie Prior and SECONDED by Cllr Phil Wright and AGREED BY ALL. Clerk to respond to NNDC. **GH**

10. Finance

10.1 The payments, receipts and bank reconciliation (Appendix C) was circulated prior to the meeting. Cllr Payne asked whether the grit bin listed was for the Treehouse Café, it was confirmed that the bin was for Church Street Toilets and the grit bin for the Treehouse has already been delivered. The finance was PROPOSED by Cllr Phil Wright and SECONDED by Cllr Maggie Prior and AGREED by all.

10.2 The quote for the beam replacement was circulated prior to the meeting. Cllr Ray Moore PROPOSED the expenditure £1240. 88 for the beam replacement with the metal footings, this was SECONDED by Cllr Maggie Prior and AGREED by ALL. Clerk to order the beam replacement. **GH**

10.3 The quote (£895) for the reprint for the Owl Trail guide was AGREED by all. Clerk to approach Simon Dry and ask about advertising on the Owl Trail website in order provide an income stream to cover printing costs. **GH**

10.4 It was noted that the intruder alarm at Nelson House had been going off during the night, the problem has been identified and fixed. An upgraded version of the alarm was discussed which allowed remote access. The Clerk

was asked to research CCTV options for Nelson House and then bring the item back to HTC for further discussion. GH

10.5 A one-off donation for Holt Primary School was discussed; HTC have been informed that the planned school trip may not go ahead due to limited funds. It was suggested covering the cost of the school trip (£195) if still required, if not a donation out of the HTC grants pot could be made available from 1st April. Cllr Sandy Roper PROPOSED £195 which was SECONDED by Cllr Phil Wright and AGREED on a majority vote with one objection received. If the school trip was already funded, then the school would be encouraged to apply to HTC as part of the community grant fund available from 1st April. GH

11. Correspondence

11.1 The NNDC letter regarding the Neighbourhood Plan Review was circulated prior to the meeting. Cllrs AGREED a review should take place ahead of LGR which is planned for 1st April 2028.

11.2 Data Protection Training is taking place on Monday 23rd February 2pm – 4pm
ALL

11.3 NNDC – Asset transfer, Cllrs were not keen to progress at this time. Clerk to inform NNDC. GH

12. NNDC Wayfinding Report

12.1 The report from NNDC was circulated prior to the meeting. Cllrs shared various concerns with the design, many preferring the existing Georgian style way markers. Cllrs would prefer all way markers replaced together for consistency but understand the current offer is for 3 replacements only. Cllrs AGREED to decline the offer from NNDC at this time but thanked them for the report which could be used to steer discussions in the future. Clerk to advise NNDC. GH

13. Cemetery Extension

13.1 The Clerk informed Cllrs of the need for a ground water survey prior to planning consent for the cemetery extension site. The survey needs to take place between January -March (wettest time of the year) to provide the most accurate results. Planning cannot be granted until the land has been declared viable for burials to take place. The survey works costs around £5000, at this time Cllrs felt the costs should be met by the developer of the site rather than by HTC. Clerk to approach the developer and ask for the survey work to take

place, ideally with specialist cemetery experts who are aware of the burial laws/criteria. GH

14. HTC Committees

14.1 The Draft Committees were circulated to Cllrs. It was noted that Jim West needs to be added to the Spout Hills Committee. Cllr Tony Pointer agreed to join Cllr Chris Bishop on the communications committee. The committee list (with the above amendments) was AGREED by all. GH

15. To consider a resolution (Under the Public Bodies Admission to Meetings Act 1960) to exclude members of the public to discuss confidential matters; namely -

15.1 **Jubilee Slates** – it was AGREED to move this item to the main agenda. The Clerk is seeking legal advice. Item to be added to the next agenda for discussion. Cllrs are still keen to recover the public money. GH

15.2 **Affordable Housing Site** – A meeting was held with developers last month to discuss a possible affordable housing site in Holt. Cllrs were supportive of the proposals. It was noted that access would be via a residential street which did cause concerns for Cllr Sue Barham.

15.3 **Holt Primary School** – This item will be moved to the main agenda next month for discussion. Cllr Sarah Tribe is still seeking a response from NCC from the questions she has asked. Cllrs are keen to see MP Steffan Aquarone get involved and asked the Clerk to approach the MP to find out more information about the Government School Rebuild programme. GH

- i. Cllr Martin Batey stated he would find out whether NNDC could help out with a valuation for the site. MB
- ii. Cllr Ray Moore suggested a Press Release from HTC informing the public on where we are with the new school and the work done to date. This was PROPOSED by Cllr Ray Moore and SECONDED by Cllr Martin Batey and AGREED by all. Cllr Moore to draft the Press Release alongside the Clerk. RM/GH
- iii. The draft public consultation on parent school choices was circulated prior to the meeting. It was AGREED to go ahead with the consultation after sharing it with NCC and the Primary School. The Press Release should coincide with the launch of the consultation. GH

16. Agree items for the next Agenda.

16.1 Holt Primary School, Cemetery Extension, Holt Society Jubilee Slates and Chapel Yard.

17. Agree date and time of next meeting.

17.1 Town Council Meeting Monday 9th March 2026 at 7pm at The Holt Playing Fields (Football Club) Woodfield Road.

Appendix A

Mayors Report

January was a busy Council month of forward-planning. The Personnel Committee reviewed and interviewed candidates to be our new replacement Town Ranger, taking up position this spring. The bar was set high and we thank everyone who contacted us about this role. Plans are underway to confirm dates to hold a week-long Holt Town Council Surgery in April, giving residents the chance to pop in and chat to a Councillor and our town clerk, ask a question or talk through anything of interest or concern. The regeneration of Chapel Yard continues, an initiative traders brought to council which we have been able to assist with - grant funding applications and admin.

Appendix B

NCC Report

Dear members,

There has been much speculation and discussion regarding the possible postponement by the Government, of this years County Council elections. I say possible because there has been a request for a judicial review on this process. I hope this helps inform your understanding of what has taken place.

Alison McGovern MP
Minister of State for Local Government and Homelessness
 2 Marsham Street
 London
 SW1P 4DF
 15 January 2026

Dear Minister,

I am writing in response to your letter of the 18th December 2025, in which you invited the leaders of 63 councils to set out our views on the postponement of our elections scheduled in May 2026, and whether we could release essential capacity from Norfolk County Council to deliver Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution effectively. Within Norfolk you have also written to the leader of a District Council - Norwich City Council. Firstly, I share your commitment to delivering Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution and recognise the benefits this could bring to our residents, whilst recognising the scale of change required to introduce further unitary councils across the country and Mayoral Combined Authorities in the Devolution Priority Programme areas. However, I must also emphasise the electorate's right to vote, which I hold dearly and, as a Conservative, would wish to see protected. I have made several public statements to this effect.

Draft February 2026 Minutes - 6 pages - 3 appendices

Signed

In your letter, you outline that previous governments have chosen to postpone elections in areas contemplating and undergoing Local Government Reorganisation to allow councils to focus their time and energy on the process. We reluctantly agreed in 2025 to the postponement of our scheduled elections in order to be part of the Devolution Priority Programme, as we recognised this was a manifesto pledge which you were keen to see implemented and wanted to ensure we had the capacity to deliver. Both your letter and this past decision identified the very real capacity challenges in delivering such significant changes. The rationale used by previous governments have included for example:

- *Avoiding short-term mandates:* It has been previously noted that electing councillors for councils “shortly to be abolished” would result in effect in one-year terms, which would be impractical and disruptive and may also be difficult to find candidates for.

- *Focus on transformation:* It was also argued that councils needed capacity to deliver structural change and without the impact of elections.

- *Democratic clarity:* Postponement was framed as preventing voter confusion about voting for councils that would soon cease to exist, e.g. people know what they are voting for and that who they vote for has a realistic chance of delivering on what was proposed to the electorate.

Page 1 of 5 • *Cost and efficiency:* It was also noted that holding elections for councils due to be dissolved would waste public money and divert resources from reorganisation work.

In Norfolk the cost of an all-out election is circa £2 million.

- *Continuity of governance:* Maintaining existing councillors until new unitary authorities were operational was presented as ensuring stability during transition.

Unsurprisingly, the same issues are relevant to any council currently facing reorganisation. However, the decision on whether to postpone elections and the legal ability to do so, is of course only a matter for national government. In this letter, as requested, I will be explicit and set out below the situation as faced by Norfolk County Council and the risks and issues arising from the National Government mandated timetable for two major structural changes, namely Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution.

What is the situation in Norfolk and the risks to implementing Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution effectively?

Elections

As I have already outlined, the County Council’s elections were originally planned to take place in May 2025 and we were asked to agree to the postponement in order to have the capacity to build a new Mayoral Combined Authority, with the election of a new Mayor for Norfolk and Suffolk in May 2026. Thus, the elections for the County Council have already been postponed once. The government has since indicated that the Mayoral elections will now be delayed until 2028. We start therefore from a less than ideal position. These delays have understandably caused some public anger and disquiet, which you will need to consider as part of your decision making.

I recognise that if government were minded to postpone the 2026 elections for councils, they would only be postponed to the new shadow elections in 2027 rather than cancelled permanently. I also assume, based on precedent that by-elections would continue as relevant.

The current situation facing Norfolk County Council is that we are due full council elections in May 2026, expect elections to the new unitary structure (Shadow Authority) in May 2027 and the now delayed election to the Mayor for Norfolk and Suffolk in May 2028, shortly after the new unitary structure is vested.

What are the implications of this schedule?

Leadership, Authority and Capacity

Your letter already acknowledges the activity required to organise elections and manage transition to new administrations. Other risks to effective implementation of local government reorganisation relate to executive capacity and capability. Locally elected members play a crucial role in representing local people, providing a voice for local communities and holding us to account. It is important that communities can choose their representatives from a strong pool of candidates. The perceived attractiveness of the role of councillor will directly impact the pool of candidates willing to put themselves forward. There is a risk that elections seen as disrupted, stagnant, or for a curtailed organisation

could reduce candidate engagement.

Capacity for activities and decision-making is compressed by the multiple pre-election periods. In effect we are already advised by our Monitoring Officer and Chief Executive that major decisions should not be made by an outgoing administration in the months Page 2 of 5 running up to an election. This is of particular relevance in light of the changes to the Devolution programme, with a new Mayor not expected to be in place until 2028 and the new Combined Authority needing to be set up and effectively run by the existing County Councils. Making the decision on Devolution once the new Statutory Instrument is published, will entail taking this through our own governance process once again (we had already signed up to the previous Statutory Instrument in October 2025). This will not be possible or good governance in the short timescale left to us before the pre-election period for elections in May 2026.

Capacity is further reduced by the need to bring members, especially cabinet members, up to speed in new roles and portfolios in order to make major decisions of the kind that are required to ensure Devolution happens. We usually see a hiatus of activity in the six months following an election, especially where the new administration has a different mandate than the previous one, and we cannot assume that any new administration will wish to endorse Devolution, which could put it in jeopardy. Norfolk County Council is a large and complex organisation with over £2bn of turnover per annum, currently addressing significant challenges around demographic pressures, SEND, and funding. While a comprehensive training programme exists for members, there is a substantial learning curve, particularly for those appointed to critical roles.

This is especially relevant to continuity of leadership. Elections in May 2026 will mean that, in the four to six months following, new members and portfolio holders will not only be learning their roles but also expected to lead and navigate the statutory processes for establishing Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution. This poses a significant risk to effective implementation and places a question mark over whether these two important government priorities will be able to be effectively enacted in Norfolk.

Local Government Reorganisation

In Norfolk, we are likely to see 8 councils replaced by either 1, 2 or 3 new unitary councils. We are anticipating the Government decision (known as the 'minded to decision') in March 2026. As we have demonstrated in our business case, a single unitary is the simplest to implement, has the least cost, the lowest risk, delivers the biggest savings and provides the largest economic benefits to Norfolk and Norwich. However, any scenario includes very significant service aggregation and disaggregation challenges. If more than one unitary is the chosen solution for Norfolk, the workload will increase exponentially. There will be significant activity and decisions required to be ready, safe and legal for vesting day. This presents a large amount of work for members and officers, to manage business as usual as well as plan the structural changes required across every council department.

Following the 'minded to' decision, extensive negotiation among the leaders of the eight councils and their senior management teams will be necessary. Decisions made at this stage will have far-reaching impact, not just in the medium term, but for the long-term ecosystem of public service in Norfolk. If the elections go ahead in May 2026, the administrations of 2 of those councils (Norfolk County and Norwich City) will be affected and the leaders of those councils may change, bringing a new dynamic to the negotiations, which could make finding consensus harder.

To meet the government's timetable for Local Government Reorganisation, Structural Change Orders (SCO) will need to be negotiated and agreed prior to September 2026. These will confirm the number of unitaries and the implementation executive. We would note that that Surrey authorities spent a significant amount of Member and Officer time in formulating the Structural Change Order and planning for its implementation. We would recommend that MHCLG meet with Surrey Councils to identify the amount of time that is Page 3 of 5 required to develop the SCO. This would indicate to MHCLG whether, objectively, we would have the amount of time needed to prepare such a document, in particular whether it is reasonably possible to achieve whilst Members are either actively campaigning in elections or in the important induction and training period after election. The public will

then go to the polls for the Shadow Elections for any new unitary council in May 2027.

Devolution

The government has recently announced a delay to the mayoral election in Norfolk and Suffolk until May 2028. There is a risk that capacity to deliver effective Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation may be impacted by additional costs and the instability referenced above.

As you know, we have worked closely with Government to secure the benefits for our residents that would be brought by Devolution and were on course to establish the MCCA in March 2026, ahead of a mayoral election in May. We have yet to finalise approval of the statutory instruments reflecting government's new approach to Devolution, and we consider that this will be likely impossible to complete this side of the pre-election period, which would commence in March 2026. In which case it would of course be for a new administration to confirm their ongoing commitment to Devolution as now defined and in partnership with Suffolk.

Financial

In Norfolk, during the above period, the provisional financial settlement sees a below average and reducing increase in core spending power assuming the maximum increase in council tax, and c90% of that funding increase is derived from Council Tax not central government funding. At the same time in the face of increasing demands and costs, Norfolk County Council will need to make financial savings of over £40m in each of the next financial years.

To implement Local Government Reorganisation, one off transition costs range from £43m for the single unitary to £82m for the three unitary scenario.

The cash costs of running the 2026 County elections are likely to be c£2 million and activity is already underway in preparation. No longer having co-terminus elections also increases costs for the subsequent mayoral election to be borne by the Mayoral Strategic Authority. This additional cash cost would not be available for other investment by the mayor or for supporting the costs of implementing local government reorganisation. If elections are postponed there is a risk of some already sunk costs for 2026. A suggestion perhaps would be to bring forward the Mayoral election to 2027, in order to be co-terminus with the new unitary elections, thereby saving some costs.

Conclusion

There are, as stated above, obvious implications regarding capacity for our council in implementing Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution within the required timescales. However, it is important that government's decision is also mindful of the very strong perceptions of those that see cancelling elections as anti-democratic, and therefore any decision to do so must be carefully considered and done for the right reasons. I believe the wording that has been consistently used by government ministers is "elections will go ahead as scheduled unless there are good reasons not to", therefore any "good reasons" must be clearly explained and justified.

Page 4 of 5 To sum up and to be explicit, as you have asked me to be, if our elections go ahead in 2026, I cannot guarantee that my council will be able to deliver Devolution because of the governance restraints. In the case of implementing Local Government Reorganisation successfully, we will face significant challenges in the reorganisation of 8 councils into a currently unknown number of unitaries. In both these cases there is the added issue of the political will and capacity of the new administration to implement the governments priorities.

I trust the above is helpful as you consider the implications of following or not following the precedents set by previous governments and hope that I have been explicit enough in outlining the risks and challenges now facing us.

In reaching your decision, you will of course consider the relative weighting of the issues raised in this letter and whether there is further scope for realigning the Mayoral election and others, in order to enable capacity in the system to be able to deliver both Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation as you require.

I would like to reiterate that although you have sought my opinion on this matter, for which I am grateful, the decision and of course legal ability to postpone elections is a matter for national government.

Draft February 2026 Minutes - 6 pages - 3 appendices

Signed

Yours sincerely,
Councillor Kay Mason Billig
 Leader of Norfolk County Council

Appendix C

Bank Reconciliation

Holt Town Council

2 February 2026 (2025-2026)

Prepared by:

Date: Approved by:

Date:

Name and Role (Clerk/RFO etc)

Name and Role (RFO/Chair of Finance etc)

Bank Reconciliation at 31/01/2026

Cash in Hand 01/04/2025 99,032.30

ADD

Receipts 01/04/2025 - 31/01/2026 324,385.14

423,417.44

SUBTRACT

256,449.83 Payments 01/04/2025 - 31/01/2026

A Cash in Hand 31/01/2026 166,967.61

(per Cash Book)

Cash in hand per Bank Statements

Petty Cash 0.00 31/01/2026

Barclays Community Account 155,704.38 31/01/2026

Barclays Business Tracker Account 123.18 31/01/2026

Barclays Business Saver Account 13,952.41 31/01/2026

169,779.97

B

Less unrepresented payments

Plus unrepresented receipts

Adjusted Bank Balance 166,967.61

166,967.61

2,812.36

A = B Checks out OK

Draft February 2026 Minutes - 6 pages - 3 appendices

Signed